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# Preface

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The Levantine production and consumption of luxurious prestige objects embellished with carved ivory or entirely carved in ivory reached a peak in the early Iron Age (c. 1000–700 BCE). The artifacts have generally not been discovered where they were made and destined to be consumed. Assyrian rulers, in the course of their successive incorporation of the Levantine states into their realm, took the vast majority of them as booty or tribute to Assyria. Smaller assemblages and scattered finds came to light in an area stretching from Iran in the east to Spain in the west. These find circumstances had an impact on scholarship. For more than a century, research has focused on stylistic classification with the aim of locating and dating the ivories' places of origin within the Levant. However, in spite of extended scholarly effort, no satisfactory, generally accepted classification has been attained. The last four volumes of *Ivories from Nimrud* exemplify the problem (Herrmann 1986, 1992; Herrmann / Laidlaw 2009, 2013): labels and formations of stylistic groupings change from one volume to the next (some in response to reviews of prior volumes) without the changes and their implications always made explicit. We seem to have reached a deadlock.

The significance of Iron Age Levantine ivories spreads out beyond the Levant. In all regions outside the Levant where Levantine ivory carvings together with other Levantine luxury goods were found, these objects – possibly also including goods that have not preserved in the archaeological record, such as textiles – inspired emulations of similar objects or adaptations of their imagery. Classical archaeologists have long assigned the prime inspiration for the birth of “Greek art” to imported Levantine luxury goods. Even if this interpretation may reveal an Euro-centric colonial perspective (Gunter 2009), there is no doubt that the spread of Levantine luxury goods from Iran to Spain had an impact on indigenous societies in this vast geographical area. Iron Age Levantine ivories probably also inspired the production of typically Assyrian ivory objects, some perhaps made by Levantine artisans at the Assyrian court. The Levant had a millennia old tradition in this craft much in contrast to Assyria. Moreover, Assyrian kings were not only the most forceful collectors of Levantine ivories (Thomason 2005: 120–150), but had also the tendency to “Assyrianize” objects, peoples, and gods of foreign territories that they conquered (Feldman 2014: 79–110).

This volume presents the proceedings of the workshop *Levantine Ivories of the Iron Age: Production, Consumption, and Style* that was held during the 61<sup>e</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Switzerland in 2015. It continues a series of workshops on 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE small-scale art initiated by Christoph Uehlinger with the exploratory workshop entitled *Cultural Contact and Innovation: The Evidence of Eastern Mediterranean Minor Art of the First Millennium BCE*, which was held in 2001 in Fribourg and published four years later (Suter / Uehlinger 2005); the second workshop on *Syrian and Phoenician Ivories of the Early First Millennium BCE: Chronology, Regional Styles and Iconographic Repertoires, Patterns of Inter-regional Distribution* was organized by Serena Cecchini and Stefania Mazzoni in 2004 in Pisa and published five years later (Cecchini et al. 2009); the third workshop was entitled *Ägypten und Levante – Kulturkontakt im Spiegel der Kleinkunst vom späten 2. zum frühen 1. Jt. v. Chr.* and organized by Eva Braun-Holzinger and Ursula Verhoeven-van Elsbergen in the context of a Sonderforschungsprojekt in 2005 in Mainz; the fourth workshop was entitled *Journée d'étude sur les ivoires d'Arslan Tash* and organized by Elisabeth Fontan in 2013 at the Louvre in Paris. While the format and formality of these workshops differed, they all aimed at bringing together scholars working on Iron Age small-scale art, and ivories in particular, in order to facilitate the discussion of problematic issues and the exchange of ideas.

The RAI workshop was born out of a personal desperation related to my research on the ivory carvings from Samaria, Israel. Although Irene Winter (1973) pioneered an early socio-economic/historical approach

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in her dissertation over forty years ago, ensuing research has largely focused on stylistic classification under the presumption that style is an entity on its own, unrelated to social networks and the human beings who made and consumed the objects. This has not only simplified the complex processes of production and consumption, but also obstructed our view on these fascinating objects by attempting a methodology that, in the end, cannot be applied to this body of material. The aim of the workshop was thus to provide a platform for discussing the present state of research and considering future avenues. Now that the publication of the Nimrud ivories is almost complete, the time is ripe for a reassessment. The participants were invited to think about the feasibility and desirability of stylistic classification; about production modes and workshop models; about what object types, carving and fixing techniques, and inscriptions can tell us; and about other avenues that might yield insights into the production and consumption of these objects.

There were some changes between the original plans, the workshop, and the final proceedings. Our respondent Irene Winter could not attend the workshop because of newly introduced Schengen travel bans relating to imminently expiring passports! Irene was so generous to comply with her task *post festum*, responding to the written versions prepared for this volume instead. Benny Sass was going to give a presentation on *The Inscriptions on Ivory, their Regional Affiliation and their Dating*, but teaching duties and other projects prevented him from coming to the workshop; he plans to take up the subject in a future volume of *Altorientalische Forschungen*. His place was filled by Liat Naeh, who is working on a dissertation on 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium Levantine ivory and bone objects and stepped in on short notice. Silvana di Paolo changed the topic of her contribution to reflect her latest research. Due to new administrative tasks at his university, Dirk Wicke, who gave a talk on *From Ivory to Bronze: Artistic Interactions across Media*, was not able to comply with the publication schedule. In return, Arianna Cinquatti, who attended the workshop and completed her Master's thesis, a stylistic assessment of ivory figurine heads from Nimrud, three months after the workshop, offered to share her new results in this volume.

Here I provide a brief summary of the following proceedings. Two of the contributions address the thorny subject of stylistic classification. Based on the problems that she encountered in her publication project on the Samaria ivories, **Claudia Suter** outlines the issues and challenges of studying style in Levantine ivories and subsequently promotes Marian Feldman's new approach. With its innovative application of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice to artistic style, this sociological approach not only provides a convincing explanation for the impracticality of the present classification endeavors, but also presents a powerful framework for understanding on-going fluidity and mobility of styles, and the relational nature of interaction among artifacts, humans, spaces, and times.

In response to Irene Winter's plea for more rigorous and explicit methods in stylistic analysis, **Arianna Cinquatti** examines a sample of figurine heads from Nimrud from both a qualitative and a quantitative perspective. Her approach and methodology follow in the footsteps of Amy Gansell's work, which, however, was mainly aimed at measuring beauty. Rather than local style-groups, Cinquatti tests the three overarching traditions or former regional styles: North Syrian, Phoenician and Intermediate/South Syrian. Her results show a certain level of interaction among the three groups with a major distinction of North Syrian ivories, while Phoenician and Intermediate ivories cluster close together. This may support the suspicion voiced in recent research that the differences between the three groups might reflect a diachronic development rather than geographical detachment. She suggests that a network model may be better suited for understanding the patterns of interaction than rigid stylistic classification.

The next two contributions focus on details of fabrication and materiality. A collaborator of the French-Italian team that is preparing an up-to-date publication of the Arslan Tash ivories, **Giorgio Affanni** makes a plea for the scrupulous examination and documentation of technical features. The Arslan Tash assemblage lends itself well to this purpose, since it comprises mostly complete furniture panels and fittings. The French-Italian team examined Schreger lines, growth rings, presence of pearls, pulp, dentine and cementum, working tool marks, and alphabetical signs. Technical drawings and color photographs were made of all six sides of each object, with the photographs taken under daylight and UV light. This meticulous documentation then enables Affanni to reconstruct the production cycle, identifying different stages of work, in addition to tracking original coloring and gilding of pieces that do not visibly show surface treatments to the human

eye. He hopes that a paleo-technical approach will allow scholars to study ancient Near Eastern ivories afresh.

Examining multi-material and multicolored ivory objects, **Silvana Di Paolo** calls attention to the arts of crafting and the perception and appreciation of the materiality of such intricate artifacts. She first provides a theoretical frame for understanding the transformation of material, enchantment of transformation, and exalted materiality. She then presents two phenomenological cases: reduction and transformation, respectively, of material. The profuse application of secondary materials, such as gold, colored stones or glass, to ivory objects, although nearly making the precious ivory invisible, saturated these objects with meaning. Similarly, the application of paint to the surface of ivory objects invoked the symbolism of colours and their capacity to create spatial illusion. Di Paolo argues that the described techniques crosscut regional and stylistic boundaries and allowed the ancient producers and consumers to time-travel in memory and imagination.

Between production and consumption, **Liat Naeh** addresses identity with regard to ivory objects in the southern Levant. She questions the often-made assumption, perhaps better bias, of biblical archaeologists that ivories consumed in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were imported from Phoenicia and thus “alien” to the material culture of this region. A review of ivory, bone, and wooden objects from mostly recent excavations in Jerusalem, Rəhov, and Hazor, however, provide evidence for a continued, indigenous tradition from the Bronze to the Iron Age, which sheds a new light on the interpretation of the Samaria ivories.

The last two contributions explore the consumption and appreciation of Iron Age ivory objects in two different cultural realms. **Marian Feldman** scrutinizes consumption patterns of Levantine ivories in the Levant. Focusing on extant Levantine cultural contexts at Zincirli, Ḥamāh, and Tall Ḥalaf as opposed to Assyrian provincial capitals, she examines the range of genres and forms of ivory objects and the type of archaeological contexts in which they came to light. The finds from these sites demonstrate that ivory objects played a central role in the display of elite Iron Age Levantine identities, both in life and death. They can be placed on a par with large-scale art in the form of stone orthostats and monumental architecture as a principal vehicle in the negotiation and contestation of power among the competing polities of the Iron Age Levant.

With his expertise in the architecture of Assyrian palaces, **David Kertai** re-examines the archaeological contexts of ivory finds in the royal palaces at Nimrud, namely the North West Palace and Fort Shalmaneser. He elucidates the difficulties of, or even impracticalities in, assessing Assyrian kings’ appreciation of ivories based on the conditions in which these buildings were found. While the excavations at Nimrud produced the by far largest amount of both Levantine and Assyrian ivories of the Iron Age, most contexts in which they came to light actually date to the time after the royal court had moved to the new capital at Nineveh, some even after the Assyrian empire had collapsed. What Kertai’s re-examination brings to the fore are 7<sup>th</sup> century non-royal agents within 9<sup>th</sup> century Assyrian palaces.

The present volume on Levantine ivories of the Iron Age is intended to raise awareness of the impracticality of applying a concept of local styles to this body of material. It is further intended to bring into view consumption and shift attention to new avenues, including the consideration of techniques and materiality, that make the study of this fascinating material constructive again. I thank all contributors for participating in this venture, and Mirko Novák for having offered us the platform of *Altorientalische Forschungen* for its dissemination.

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